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Namibia
12 – 25 September 2013

Participants in this private holiday of regular Honeyguiders and friends:

John and Jan Croft, George and Sue Battle.

Leader

Geoff Crane

All the photos in this report were taken during the holiday,
those edged orange by John and Jan Croft and edged blue by Geoff Crane.

Front cover compilation of photos by John and Jan Croft:

top – Lesser Flamingoes, middle l to r – Northern Korhaan, Kudu and Kori Bustard,
bottom – Zebras and Springboks.

Daily Diary by Geoff Crane.

DAILY DIARY

Day 1: Thursday 12 September 2013.

Accommodation for 2 nights: Bougain Villa Guest House, Windhoek.

The plane arrived at the Windhoek International Airport on time and with no problems, which is always a relief! We settled in to our guest house with a cup of tea and a light lunch. It was a particularly hot and sunny day so we had a short early afternoon siesta before going out to the Avis Dam area to do some birdwatching. We had great views of an African Fish Eagle circling over the last remaining part of the water in the dam. The rains at the beginning of the year had been particularly bad, so the dam was only about 20% full and as we were to find out in the course of the next two weeks the whole of Namibia was very dry.



Pale Chanting Goshawk left, and eating a dead porcupine above.

We saw a juvenile Pale Chanting Goshawk eating a dead porcupine. A 'fly past' by a Gabar Goshawk. Egyptian Goose, African Darter, Helmeted Guineafowl, Three-banded Plover, Blacksmith Lapwing, Little Stint, Grey Lourie, Rock Dove, Speckled Pigeon, Cape Turtle and Laughing Dove, European and Bradfield's Swifts, Rock Martin, Red-eyed Bulbul, Mountain Wheatear, Black-chested Prinia, Pririt Batis, Cape Wagtail, Grassveld Pipit, White-browed Sparrow-weaver, Red-billed Quelea, Common and Black-faced Waxbill, Yellow Canary and a totally out of place Red-billed Firefinch! A troop of Chacma Baboons disappeared into the hills on our approach and a Yellow Mongoose was seen in our lodge gardens. Not bad for a hot afternoon in Windhoek!

We had a great dinner at Windhoek's famous Joe's Beer House before heading back to the guest house for a good night's sleep.

Day 2: Friday 13 September 2013 – Windhoek Botanical Gardens.

After a leisurely breakfast we headed off to the Botanical Gardens. The gardens were very dry but we still saw some good birds. The sports playing fields over the road from the entrance to the gardens were being irrigated, which was helpful. We saw White-tailed Shrike, Cape Glossy and Wattled Starling, Ground-scraper Thrush, Pale-winged Starling and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and plenty of nesting Little Swifts in the eaves of the Botanical Society building. A large Gray Mongoose and three Ground Squirrels were seen digging up the football pitches!

Our walk through the gardens started with a look at some of the desert plants that we were likely to see on our travels. We then went for a circular walk through the gardens looking out for birds. Cardinal Woodpecker, Rufus-vented Titbabbler, Rattling Cisticola, Marico Flycatcher, Marico, White-bellied and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, House Sparrow, Southern Masked Weaver, Blue Waxbill, White-throated Canary, and Damara Hornbill were seen. We also saw the yellow-headed Namibian Rock Agama at the gardens.

We had a light lunch in downtown Windhoek and then settled in for an early afternoon siesta. An afternoon breeze made a walk around the far section of the Avis Dam very pleasurable. Black-shouldered Kite, Rock Kestrel, Black-headed Heron, Familiar Chat, Scimitar-billed Wood-hoopoe and Mountain Wheatear were seen. Rock Dassies were sunning themselves on the rocky crags and a family of Warhogs and a troop of Chacma Baboons made a hasty retreat to the hills before the dog walkers arrived. We had a lovely dinner in a Portuguese restaurant near to the guest house.

Day 3: Saturday 14 September 2013 – Windhoek to Sesriem.

Accommodation for one night: Sossus Dune Lodge, Sesriem.

We had an early breakfast before setting off south on the B1 to Rrobeth. We topped up with fuel at Rehoboth, (you never know if there will be fuel in the desert!) before heading off on our leisurely drive, to the heart of the Namib-Naukluft National Park. Gemsbok, Springbok, Kudu and Chacma Baboons were spotted as well as Cape Wagtail, Pale-chanting Goshawk, Cape Sparrow, Ant-eating Chat, European Bee-eater and a huge Sociable Weavers' nest with resident weavers, which we stopped to photograph. We stopped here and there to see what was flowering or flying (there was not much flowering!) and also to look at the diverse geological rock features. We also came across the local alternative transport, the 'Kalahari Ferrari'.



'Kalahari Ferrari', and the huge nests of Sociable Weavers.

We had our picnic next to a stream in the canyon of the Remhoogte Pass. We stopped at Solitare for a leg stretch and to do some birdwatching. Sociable Weavers, Glossy Starling, Cape, House and Southern Gray-headed Sparrows and a few Ground Squirrels were seen.

At Sesriem we had a look at the Sesriem Canyon before checking into our lodge. Our luxury 'tents' had fantastic views across the plains to the red sand dunes in the far distance. A few cold beers whilst watching the sun go down followed by a good dinner set us up for total relaxation! We had a clear night with a full moon which was nice, but it did outshine the stars to some extent.

Day 4: Sunday 15 September 2013 – Sossusvlei/Namib-Naukluft National Park/Swakopmund. Accommodation for 3 nights: Lagoon Lodge, Walvis Bay.

We started the day way before dawn at 04:30 with a cup of coffee and a rusk. The plan was to be at the dunes for sunrise.... The one hour drive from the lodge to the dunes of Sossusvlei was driven in the dark and while we were waiting for the 4x4 Landrover to take us through the sand, we first heard and then were very lucky to see a beautiful Brown Hyaena. At Sossusvlei, we climbed part way up the main big dune to get a better view of the changing light and colours on the red sand-dunes.



The dunes at Sossusvlei in the early morning light, and Lesser Flamingos at Walvis Bay.

We ate our picnic breakfast on the dunes with the Cape Sparrows and Familiar Chats. Springbok were in profusion and we saw a few Gemsbok heading off into the dunes for the day. On the way back to the lodge we saw Ludwig's Bustard, Rüppell's Korhaan, Black and Pied Crow and Fiscal Shrike.

We had a quick turnaround at the lodge before setting off on our drive through the Namib-Naukluft National Park. At Solitaire we stopped for a coffee and apple pie before continuing to Walvis Bay, on the coast, where a quick scan over the tidal mudflats produced a multitude of waders and hundreds/thousands of Greater and Lesser Flamingos.

Day 5: Monday 16 September 2013 – Walvis Bay/Swakopmund/Cape Cross.

The morning was spent around the Walvis Bay lagoon. The lagoon is regarded as one of the most important wetlands along the west coast of Southern Africa, not only for the large numbers of resident species found here, but particularly for the vast numbers of both intra-African and Palaeartic migrants. The area around Walvis Bay holds 90-95% of the world population of Chestnut-banded Plovers and I think we saw about 90 to 95% of them! Greater and Lesser Flamingos were in their hundreds, Great White Pelican, White-breasted and Cape Cormorants, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Cape Teal, Ringed, White-fronted, Kittlitz's, Chestnut-banded, Grey and Three-banded Plovers, Turnstone, Ruff, Common, Marsh, Baird's and Curlew Sandpiper, Avocet, Greenshank, Common Knot (which was not so common!) Little Stint, Sanderling, Black-winged Stilt, Dunlin and Red-necked Phalarope were all seen well.



Chestnut-banded Plover.

We picked up a picnic lunch as we drove through Swakopmund, which we enjoyed further up the coast by the very old lichen fields on the gravel plains. The wind was quite strong by now, which was nice as it bought a cool sea breeze with it.

We continued up the Skeleton Coast to Cape Cross. Here we saw hundreds of Cape Fur Seals and plenty of Black-backed Jackal tracks. Turnstone, White-fronted and Kittlitz's Plovers, Kelp Gulls, Cape Gannets and Swift, Common and Sandwich Terns were also seen here.



The wreck with perched Cape and White-breasted Cormorants; and Cape Fur Seals.

We stopped to photograph the bizarre seaside settlements of Vloskasbaken and Henties Bay and also an old fishing boat shipwreck. The wreck had a small colony of Cape and White-breasted Cormorants on it and also a small colony of locals selling rocks and minerals at the viewpoint – but no diamonds for sale! We had a good dinner at 'The Raft' in Walvis Bay – hearing a nocturnal Whimbrel on the way in!

Day 6: Tuesday 17 September 2013 – Namib-Naukluft National Park.

After a good breakfast we headed for Swakopmund for the morning. We did a turn past the lagoon to see if we could locate the Whimbrel that we had been hearing..... and found it under the restaurant from last night. While I had the vehicle washed and the tyres checked and re-aligned, the group looked around Swakopmund and the 'Crystal Gallery' – one of the displays is the largest amethyst crystal in the world. We had our lunch at Anton's Café in Swakopmund, with some of their famous pastries.

For the afternoon we ventured deeper into the desert and the massive Namib-Naukluft National Park via the Swakop River valley and the Moon Landscape, formed over 460 million years ago. 1,500 year-old welwitschias, Dollar bushes, Pencil bushes and mist-gathering lichens were seen and identified. Fiscal Shrike, Rüppel's Korhaan, Familiar Chat and White-bellied Sunbird were seen on the welwitschia trail.

Back in Walvis Bay for a late cup of tea and some Flamingo photography! (Which is much harder than it sounds!).

Day 7: Wednesday 18 September 2013 – Swakopmund to Otjiwarongo.

Accommodation for one night: Otjibamba Lodge, Otjiwarongo.

At breakfast we watched some Bottlenose Dolphins 'herding' fish in the lagoon and the Great White Pelicans were doing the same with regimental precision. Cape Fur Seals, Cormorants and Terns were also joining in the feeding frenzy.

We left the sand dunes and sea mists of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund and headed inland to Otjiwarongo. It was good to be in bushveld again, with trees! We stopped a few times en route to look at birds and again at Omaruru for lunch.

We checked into our lodge at Otjiwarongo and then relaxed through the heat of the afternoon. At 16:30 we ventured out on one of the short trails. We saw Pririt Batis, Black-faced Waxbill, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Fork-tailed Drongo, Chat Flycatcher, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Ground-scraper Thrush, Red-eyed Bulbul, Red-faced Mousebird, Red-billed Francolin and a number of 'camp' birds around the swimming pool. Later on into the evening Blue Wildebeest, Warthog, Kudu and Black-faced Impala came to the little waterhole in front of the lodge.

Day 8: Thursday 19 September 2013 – Otjiwarongo to Etosha National Park.

Accommodation for 2 nights: Okaukuejo Camp, Etosha National Park.

Before breakfast we had some good birding around the waterhole in front of the lodge. African Hoopoe, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Ground-scraper Thrush, Red-eyed Bulbul, Red-faced Mousebird and Red-billed Francolin were seen. We stopped at the town of Outjo for a leg stretch (and a coffee and shopping) and then continued on to Etosha National Park.



Burchell's Zebras.

On arrival at the Okaukuejo Camp we had a couple of Elephants at the main waterhole in front of the cottages. The middle of the day is the safest time of day to be near the waterholes and most the mammals in the park know this..... I think they were all around this particular waterhole! We had a steady procession of Gemsbok, Kudu, Giraffe, Springbok, Black-faced Impala, Burchell's Zebra and Blue Wildebeest coming in to drink. These mammals numbered in their hundreds.

After a short siesta, we drove up to the Okondeka waterhole on the edge of the pan. Here we found a pride of Lions – sleeping out the heat of the afternoon. The Black-backed Jackals were keeping a respectable distance from the Lions, and the plains game, as well as Ostriches, were cautiously coming in to drink on the far side of the waterhole. South African Shelduck and Cape Teal were on the shallow bit of water and Northern Black Korhaan, Crowned Lapwing, Namaqua Sandgrouse, Rufous-naped Lark, Spike-heeled Lark and Black-throated Canary were seen en route to the waterhole. After dinner we spent some time watching the floodlit waterhole before retiring to bed for our early start tomorrow morning.

Day 9: Friday 20 September 2013 – Etosha National Park

We saw 12 mammal species today, with Red Hartebeest, Spotted Hyaena and Black Rhino being new sightings to the trip. At the Nebrowni waterhole an Elephant had been killed by another Elephant so there were plenty of Hyaenas, Jackals and Vultures about. The carcass was too far away to get good views of the 'action' but perhaps we were better off where we were – the smell must have been very bad!

We visited a number of the local waterholes, Gemsbokvlakte, Gaseb, Leeubron – some were dry and others were attracting a good steady stream of wildlife. We saw about 50 bird species today, which was pretty good seeing as it was very hot and dry. New birds to our list were; Rufous-cheeked Nightjar at the main waterhole (last night), White-backed Vulture, Tawny Eagle, Kori Bustard, Ludwig's Bustard, Red-crested Korhaan, Burchell's Courser, Scaly-feathered Finch, Chestnut-backed and Grey-backed Finchlark and Red-breasted Swallow. A large Monitor Lizard (4 foot) was seen near the Natco waterhole and Hinged Terrapins were in most of the waterholes.

After dinner we spent some time watching the floodlit waterhole – a few Black Rhinos, one with a very young one, Rufous-cheeked Nightjars and a few unidentified Bats.

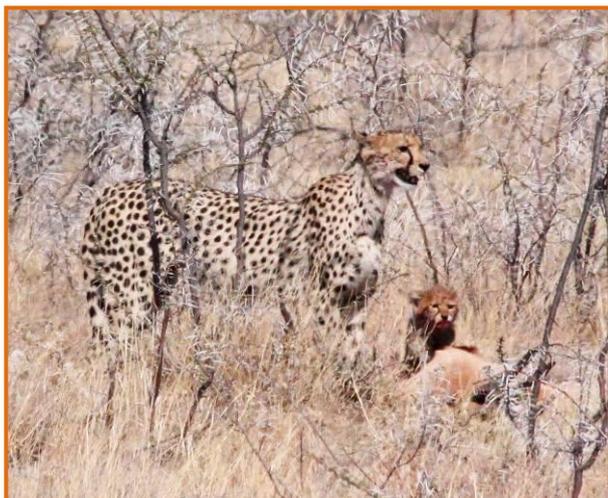
Day 10: Saturday 21 September 2013 – Etosha National Park.

Accommodation for one night: Halali Camp, Etosha National Park.

We set off early, with cases packed and vehicle loaded. We decided to make the most of the cool of the morning. White-crowned Shrike, Red-headed Finch, Lark-like Bunting, Short-toed Rock Thrush, White-browed Scrub-robin, Long-billed Crombec, Green Wood-hoopoe, Grey, Yellow and Red-billed Hornbill, Sabota Lark, African Jacana, Double-banded Courser, Black-necked and Little Grebe were the new birds for the trip.

We came across a Cheetah and four cubs at a recent kill. They had obviously eaten their fill as the cubs were all as round as footballs! The family walked off to find some shade so we continued on towards Halali Camp via a few more waterholes. A large Lion was seen at the Homob waterhole and Sueda and Salvadora waterholes were teeming with plains game. We saw a number of Steenbok today, especially in the burnt areas.

On arrival at Halali we went to the waterhole, which did not disappoint! We had a small herd of Elephants and a lone Black Rhino. One of the younger Elephants tried intimidating the Rhino but the young Elephant ran for mum as soon as the Rhino merely twitched its tail! After lunch we had more good views of Black Rhino and Elephant at the Goas waterhole. Tree Squirrels were the 17th mammal species of the day and were photographed outside the cottages within the camp.



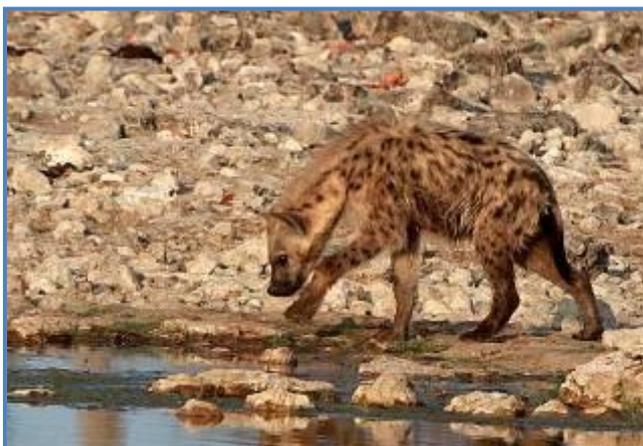
Cheetah with one cub visible at a recent kill; and elephant/rhino stand-off at the waterhole.

Day 11: Sunday 22 September 2013 – Etosha National Park.

Accommodation for one night: Namutoni Camp, Etosha National Park.

We were watching some Lions resting up in the shade of some trees at the Goas waterhole. The Black-faced Impala, Burchell's Zebra, Kudu and Gemsbok were all getting very agitated at not being able to drink, but the Impalas slowly plucked up courage for a quick drink. A Bateleur flew down to the waterhole and a Common Moorhen went about its business none the wiser! Great Sparrows were in amongst a mixed flock of small seed-eaters that were coming in to drink. Once we had watched our fill with the Lion/Antelope interaction, we started noting all the birds around the waterhole – Lark-like Bunting, Red-billed Quelea, Black-throated Canary, Black-faced Waxbill.... Starlings... Waders.....

We had lunch at the Namutoni Camp, before parking off for a few hours in our air-conditioned rooms to rest. Fortified with an afternoon cup of tea we went off in search of the elusive Damara Dik-dik (which turned out not to be so elusive). We had great views of many individuals and also Spotted Hyaena, Giraffe and all the usual plains game. At the Klein Namutoni waterhole we saw Cape Shoveler, Southern Pochard, South African Shelduck, Little Grebe, Red-billed and Cape Teal and several waders. A Monteiro's Hornbill was new to the trip list and a Tawny Eagle was also nice to see roosting in a tree on the other side of the waterhole.



Spotted Hyaena.

Day 12: Monday 23 September 2013 – Etosha National Park to the Waterberg National Park.

Accommodation for 2 nights: Waterberg National Park.

We went for an early morning drive around the Dik-dik trail before breakfast. More Damara Dik-diks and many birds were seen – but alas no Leopards! After breakfast we packed the vehicle and set off for the Waterberg National Park.

Rosy-faced Lovebirds, Rüppell's Parrot, Crested Francolin, Alpine Swift, Grey Lourie, Grey Hornbill, African Hawk Eagle, Crimson-breasted Shrike, African Hoopoe, Rufus Vented Titbabbler, Burchell's Starling and a Small Grey Mongoose with a tail missing, were there to greet us at the Waterberg Camp.



A pile of Mongooses (Mongeeese?)

We had lunch and then made a plan to have a walk later on when it started to cool down a bit. We had Chacma Baboons, Damara Dik-dik and Warthogs on the lawns in front of the cottages and also a band of about 20 Banded Mongooses. Before settling in for the night the Mongooses made a great heap of moving fur and whiskers, by piling on top of each other. They then peeled off one by one and went down their burrow.

On the way back from dinner we saw a Lesser Bushbaby in the trees next to the road.

Day 13: Tuesday 24 September 2013 – Waterberg Mountains.

We went for a birding walk through the forests below the cliff face. Baboons, Damara Dik-dik, a large male Kudu and a Slender Mongoose were seen as well as a few new birds like the African Puffback and Ashy Tit. At breakfast the Banded Mongooses were clearing the braai area of any possible leftovers and the Rüppell's Parrot was working through the red flowers in the Waterberry Tree by the restaurant. We went for another walk after breakfast, but it was getting hotter so we retreated to our cottages.

We went for an afternoon game drive in the park's open-top Land Rover to the top of the plateau. The plateau is right out of Arthur Conan Doyle's 'Lost World'! With sheer cliffs all around and only one way up and down. Surprisingly the top of the plateau was very sandy so the 4x4 was being used to its full potential. The first waterhole was very quiet but we saw a large herd of Sable Antelope and a few Roan Antelope en route to the second waterhole. Here we saw a large herd of Cape Buffalos and some Eland and a lone Common Duiker. It began to get dark so we made our way back to the camp. En route, we came across two White Rhinos in the middle of the road, which was nice to see. We were hoping that the lightning and thunder would wait another ten minutes until we arrived at the camp – but no.... we all got soaked.



Damara Dik-dik.

Day 14: Wednesday 25 September 2013 – Waterberg Mountains, Windhoek and home.

Today being our last day was more 'get ourselves organised' than anything else. We had breakfast, packed our bags and vehicle and then headed off for Windhoek and the airport. Not much happened en route... we came across an area of hundreds of White-backed Vultures and we stopped every now and then for a bird on a wire. We had lunch at the airport and then said our farewells and goodbyes.